

# GOLDEN BEECHES

HERALD SUN  
23-9-01

**Grand vision:**  
The art deco mansion, Burnham Beeches.

The hills are alive with the sound of bellbirds and bidding. The Dandenong Ranges, particularly the Sherbrooke area, is hot property now. JANE HOWARD reports on the tranquil mountain retreat

**B**urnham Beeches, one of Australia's finest examples of art deco style and the former country residence of the late "Aspro king", Alfred Nicholas, is on the market.

The vast three-storey home in the Dandenongs, which has more recently been a luxury hotel, is considered one of the best examples of art deco architecture in Australia — comparable with the finest properties in the US and

Britain. The big house was designed to resemble an ocean liner with long cantilevered balconies, wide spans and continuous windows.

Set in 22ha of European-style gardens, it has been listed for sale with Hotel Consulting Services, Sydney.

If it does not sell prior, it will be auctioned in late November on a date to be set.

The asking price is about \$4 million.

The property is being sold

by hotel developers Lustig and Moar, the group responsible for the Grand Hyatt and Park Hyatt.

Lustig and Moar and Macquarie Bank have just announced plans to transform the old art deco Russell St police headquarters into a \$160-million, residential complex of 360 apartments.

Burnham Beeches was a rural retreat for the Nicholas family until it was taken over by the Nicholas Institute for

Medical and Veterinary Research in 1955.

In the early '80s it was converted to a luxury guest house and restaurant and developed a reputation as a quality venue for society weddings and functions.

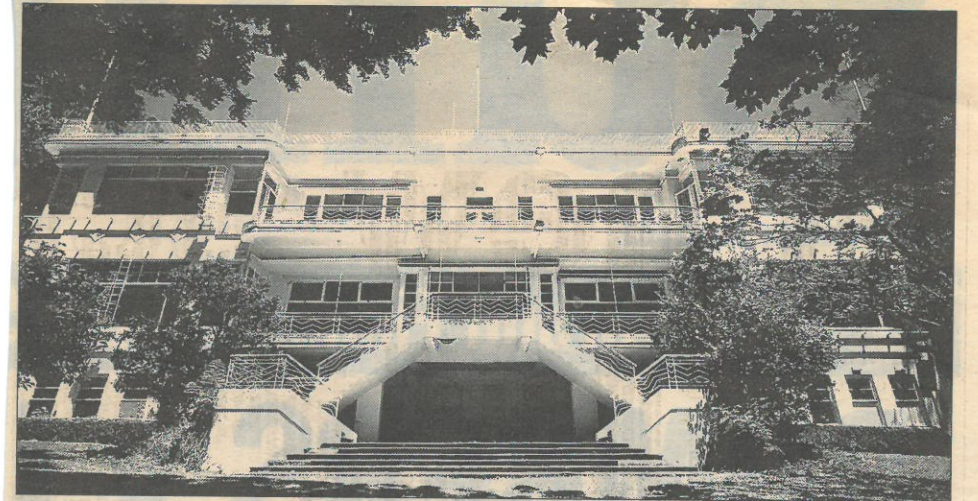
The property has been closed for eight years.

Lustig and Moar bought it in 1997 for \$2.41 million from interests associated with Aman Resorts.

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Sunday Herald Sun, September 23, 2001

## Deco dame for sale



**Sale ahoy:** Burnham Beeches, designed along the lines of an ocean liner.

**BURNHAM** Beeches, one of the nation's finest art deco mansions and a former rural retreat of the late "Aspro king", Alfred Nicholas, is for sale.

The property has been listed with Hotel Consulting Services of Sydney with an asking price of about \$4 million.

It will be auctioned in late November if it does not sell privately.

Burnham Beeches was

**JANE HOWARD**  
Property editor

designed along the lines of an ocean liner by Harry Norris, one of the leading between-wars architects.

Construction in reinforced concrete began in 1930 and the lavish home was completed three years later.

The home was converted to a medical and veterinary

research centre in 1955 and became a luxury guest house and function venue in the 1980s.

It has been closed for the past eight years.

Set on 22ha of rolling grounds, with European-style gardens, it adjoins the Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens, handed to the State Government by the Nicholas family in 1965.

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# Golden glow to the hills

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These interests had bought it as an operating hotel for \$7.5 million in 1988.

Lustig and Moar had planned a \$10-million upgrade but decided to concentrate instead on larger projects.

Managing-director Max Moar described Burnham Beeches as "unique".

"It is very well constructed and it is an icon building," he said.

"Once restored it will be magnificent — the gardens are fantastic.

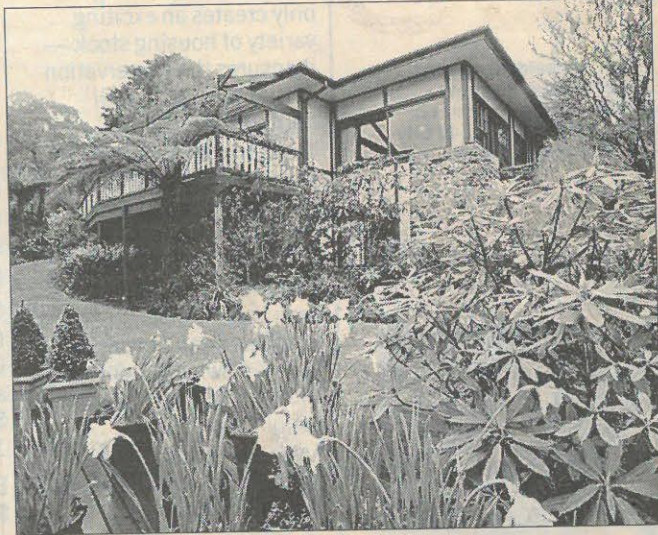
Mr Moar said approval had been granted to double the number of rooms, build 59 villa units, a ballroom, conference room, private meeting and function rooms and a modern spa.

Mr Moar said the property would suit an operator or developer of smaller hotels, or a hotel chain.

The house was designed by prominent architect Harry Norris and built between 1930 and 1933.

"Burnham Beeches is a significant example of a retreat built in the traditions of a colonial hill station," according to Heritage Victoria.

"... of hill station-type homesteads in Victoria, only



**Record breaker:** Selsdon Park, Sherbrooke, is expected to break through the \$1 million barrier. Picture: ROB LEESON

Duniera at Mt Macedon has comparable gardens and no other example has farmlands on the same scale.

"It is a rare domestic example of the moderne genre ... and is historically important for its associations with wealthy businessman Alfred Nicholas."

The sale comes at a time when the Sherbrooke-Sassafras-Ferny Creek property market is running hot.

Ray Abley, principal of R.T. Abley Real Estate Professionals, who has lived and sold properties in the hills for 23 years, said the Dandenongs market could be split in two.

The first zone — Belgrave-Tecoma-Upwey — had moderately priced properties of 0.1ha-0.2ha ranging from \$140,000 to \$300,000.

The second zone — Sherbrooke-Sassafras-Ferny Creek — saw entry points for homes about \$400,000.

Mr Abley said it was not uncommon to receive \$1 million for acreages and multi-title properties.

The growth in values in the Sherbrooke zone had been a "phenomenal" 20 per cent in the past 12 months, he said.

Mr Abley said advertising interstate and on the Internet had helped lift prices.

"We have people flying in from Sydney to inspect and bid at auction," he said.

"They find it cheap compared to comparable property in the Southern Highlands of NSW."

"For properties that 12 months ago were worth \$500,000, they will put down a \$70,000 deposit and offer \$700,000.

"Many of these Sydney people are looking at retirement, so we have brought in people from outside and locals now realise that they have to pay more to get the properties."

Richard Hodgman, also of

Abley Real Estate, said the \$1 million barrier was likely to be broken for a single residential property in Sherbrooke, with the sale of Selsdon Park, at 23 Sherbrooke Rd, Sherbrooke.

Set on 2.8ha — including 1.2ha of English gardens — the 465sq m, three-bedroom house is based on stately English homes with high ceilings, timber panelling and leadlights.

There is also a self-contained, double-bedroom unit and a cottage with a double-bedroom on the property.

For auction on Saturday,

October 6 at 2pm, Mr Hodgman said its quoted price was \$1.25 million to \$1.6 million.

Highlighting the growth in values, Mr Abley said he bought a home on 0.4ha in the Sherbrooke area for \$61,000, 23 years ago. It was now worth \$400,000.

Mr Abley said residents of the eastern suburbs were also looking at the hills seeking properties for retirement.

"Over the past 10 years, very few properties in the Dandenong Ranges have changed hands — it is not unusual for properties to pass down to the children for use as a holiday retreat or family home," he said.

"While in the suburbs, the average residential turnover is close to every eight years. In the Dandenongs, families stay put."

He said there was a large demand for retirement accommodation in the area.

Mr Abley said the new owners of Burnham Beeches would find strong demand if they built retirement villas on the property.

Many elderly residents in the Dandenongs wanted to scale down from big homes, but did not want to leave the hills.

"Hills people live here and die here. They do not want to leave," he said.